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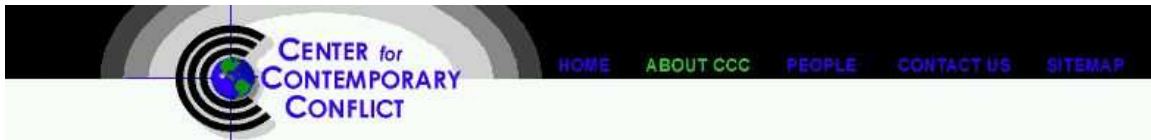
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Viewpoint: Lost Years, Lost Opportunities: Bush Foreign Policy

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by David W. Wise

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Introduction

As the Obama Administration makes the transition to a new course in American foreign policy, it is appropriate to look back to the last Administration to glean lessons from their recent experience dealing with the same international issues. Sadly, given America's current low standing in the world and overstretched military, there are many lessons for the incoming Administration to observe. The issue is not just American exceptionalism, the policy of preemption or the use of force. What is most at issue is a lack of internal policy coherence that ends up making things worse, not better, and which has squandered opportunities for America to lead the world to a better place. The Bush policymakers, contrary to logic, went out of their way to drive opponents closer together, to drive our friends away and to have actions taken in one area make matters more troublesome in another.

Iraq

If, following the attacks of September 11, 2001 the Bush Administration defined the strategic context in which the United States was then operating as a worldwide threat from Islamic fundamentalist extremism, it made a peculiar decision to attack perhaps the one country in the entire Muslim world where such extreme religious fundamentalism was most in check. In so doing, the Bush Administration destabilized a region of the world that was already surrounded by too much dangerous instability. In one step Iraq, which had been a counterbalance to Iran, created a vacuum which invited increased influence inside Iraq by the Iranians (both competing Shia factions in Iraq have ties to Iran), while the Sunni areas became center stage for an insurgency. The invasion also created a vacuum which sucked in extremists from outside Iraq while unsettling Turkey, our NATO ally, which was concerned about the Kurds. With incredulity, the Bush Administration cited the fact that Iraq was the frontline of its "war on terrorism" as a justification for its invasion, when it only became such a battleground as a result of the invasion itself.

Perhaps constrained by a worldview inbred from the Cold War, the Bush Administration seemed directed by the need to take action against a nation state, here Iraq, and a "war" on terror, rather than seeing that terrorism was and remains a very complex and extra-national response to a variety of factors—political and economic and cultural—and not susceptible to the "decisive" battle. Perhaps bound by a similar Cold War mindset of throw weights and comparative measures of conventional military power, the Administration failed to understand that such conventional power was inadequate and, in some cases, counterproductive to affecting the political situation

on the ground. To use the phrase coined by General Rupert Smith, American actions lacked any "utility of force."^[1] In landing as the triumphant warrior in military garb on the aircraft carrier Abraham Lincoln President Bush confirmed the view in the eyes of a billion Muslims that the United States had gone to Iraq as conqueror rather than liberator. The Administration seemed tone deaf to the opinions of those whose hearts and minds we wanted to win over and oblivious to the dictum that the purpose of military action is to win the peace.

September 11 created an exceptional opportunity for President Bush to exhibit world leadership. There was an outpouring of goodwill for the United States by even those who customarily did not hold that view. There was a tremendous opportunity for the United States to forge an international consensus and to take meaningful actions to address terrorism, (both the threat and its causes), but the Administration very soon squandered that opportunity by its decision to unilaterally invade Iraq. The invasion took the focus off of terrorism (soon replaced by a neo-Wilsonian mission to spread democracy) which then not only undercut our actions to address terrorism but which drove respect for America and its moral leadership to the lowest levels in history. The period immediately following September 11 also provided the president with a unique opportunity to call for increased conservation and other efforts to lessen U.S. dependence on foreign oil. The Bush Administration, however, requested no sacrifice by the American people. Instead, President Bush became the first president to give a tax cut in a time of war, as he financed the war on credit while the American economy itself embarked on a credit binge.

Whether one agrees with the Bush Doctrine or not, its application to Iraq was strange. From the outset, Pakistan was clearly the center of gravity in any meaningful action on terrorism. Pakistan, and not Iraq, was the country that most closely met the conditions outlined in the Bush Doctrine. The government of Pakistan was the main sponsor of the Taliban in Afghanistan under whose protection the September 11 attacks were launched. Pakistan, a non signatory of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, possessed nuclear weapons, the means to deliver them and was, in fact, a proliferator of nuclear technology. Pakistan had significant pockets of support and recruitment for militant extremist groups. In Pakistan a person like Mir Aimal Kansi, who had brazenly murdered employees outside CIA headquarters, found refuge in the immediate aftermath of the killings. President Bush could have organized a meaningful international coalition for action in Afghanistan, as his father had done with Iraq a decade earlier, and possibly for limited action within sanctuary areas in Pakistan tied to specific and limited objectives. Instead, the Bush Administration took its eye off the ball and drew resources away from Afghanistan and from the actual terrorist threat, consequently losing global support for military and non-military actions that would have been relevant to the actual threat to the United States.

Nonproliferation

The objective of halting the spread of nuclear weapons technology enjoys widespread support around the world. A treaty structure is in place to support that objective. Here again, the Bush Administration record is erratic. In his first State of the Union address following the September 11 attacks, on January 29, 2002; President Bush proclaimed the infamous "axis of evil" in which he linked three totally unrelated countries into a single classification prompted by his simplistic view of the world, which divided everything into black and white. That shortly after the speech President Bush invaded one of the three "axis of evil countries" and changed its regime by force of arms was not lost on the other two "axis" countries. Not surprisingly, in response the other two countries, Iran and North Korea, seemed to have accelerated their nuclear programs as such weapons would be the only credible deterrent to possible American invasions.

When, in 2003, Iran signaled a possible willingness to negotiate about weapons, it was rebuffed by the Administration.^[2] This was one of the few times when the invasion of Iraq actually might have had some of the collateral benefit that the Administration had hoped to gain from the invasion, yet President Bush did not take advantage of it. The Bush Administration also took other actions that undermined the overall objective of non-proliferation and arms control. It unilaterally

terminated the Anti-Ballistic Missile (ABM) Treaty, a signature treaty in arms control which then led to Russian withdrawal from START II in response. It struck a major nuclear deal with India, itself one of just four countries that have not signed on to the Non-Proliferation regime (189 have signed). This latter act may serve to drive Pakistan somewhat closer to China, while part of the motivation of the deal with India was to counterbalance China in that region. All of these actions lack internal logic and coherence and often worked at cross purposes.

Iran

After the onset of military action in Afghanistan, the United States and Iran had extensive behind-the-scenes contact through which both countries cooperated to try to bring order as the Taliban, whom the Iranians also opposed, were defeated. Earlier, following the September 11 attacks, the then President of Iran, Mohammad Khatami, had denounced the attacks and, on a subsequent trip to New York to address the United Nations, brought Iranian intelligence experts along in an attempt to assist the United States. His efforts were rebuffed. Early the following year Iran was horrified to see that after these conciliatory efforts Bush named Iran as one of the members of the "axis of evil." In 2003, the Iranians, in a message delivered through the Swiss Ambassador, proposed a "grand bargain" to the United States in which Iran would have supported the Saudi Arabian "Beirut Declaration" aimed at negotiating a comprehensive peace with Israel and also a cessation of Iran's nuclear arms program. In return, Iran wanted to be removed from the U.S. list of terrorist states and to have the United States re-establish diplomatic relations, recognize Iran's security interests and eschew regime change as a U.S. foreign policy objective with regard to Iran [3].

Again the Bush Administration rebuffed these gestures. No one can be naïve about Iran's own record in supporting terrorism, but it is precisely with regimes that are unfriendly that moderation of policies and containment of potential threats is needed, not with friends. It is often stated that American policy seeks to encourage moderates inside Iran who will press for change. The United States may not have a better chance to work with a moderate than we had with President Khatami, a man who expressed a desire for a "dialogue among civilizations" and a willingness to work together to understand the root causes of terrorism. Instead, the United States now has to deal with President Ahmadinejad, a resurgent nuclear weapons program and an ascendant Iran which seeks to maximize its influence throughout the region, not least of which being influence in Iraq.

Russia

The collapse of the Soviet Union after five decades of resolute, bipartisan effort by the West created an historic opportunity for America to lead the world to a more secure future. Russia agreed to the peaceful reunification of Germany in the Two Plus Four agreement. The United States and Russia reached agreements on the reduction and control of nuclear arms. Russia was in the initial stages of a process aimed at democratization and the establishment of a market economy. Russia, along with the Western powers, formed the "Quartet", with the goal of finding a solution to the Israeli/Palestinian conflict and bringing about a sustainable peace. Following the September 11 attacks, Russia participated in the Six plus Two talks aimed at bringing stability to Afghanistan (Iran was also a participant in those talks). Russia allowed overflight rights to assist in the allied effort in Afghanistan and it did not object when American bases to be used in the war in Afghanistan were set up in Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan—both former Soviet republics and allies of Russia. That same accommodation will again be essential for logistical support to supply the 2009 surge of NATO forces in Afghanistan. Given their own concerns with Muslim separatist populations within their own borders, the Russians had a congruence of interest with the United States in terms of the threat from terrorism.

Unfortunately, America did not appear to reciprocate this willingness to move from former adversary to participant in a new order. The United States during the Clinton Administration, motivated by humanitarian concerns, became involved in a bombing campaign directed against Serbia in order to protect Kosovo. Russian identification with the Serbs extended back until the time of the Tsars and this NATO action reverberated within Russian politics and probably contributed to the rise of Vladimir Putin as president of Russia at about the same time. In addition, the expansion of NATO (which was initiated in the Clinton Administration) was accelerated by the Bush Administration. At the White House ceremony at which the latest seven former Eastern bloc countries were welcomed into NATO in 2004, President Bush stated with great satisfaction that there had been an increase in these nations' defense budgets although it was unclear against whom this increased spending was to protect, since ostensibly the expansion of NATO so broadly was to reduce, not increase, military threats. The Bush Administration unilaterally abrogated the Anti-Ballistic Missile (ABM) Treaty and proceeded with the installation of missile defense systems in the Czech Republic and Poland, in spite of Russian statements that they saw these moves as threatening. Finally, in 2007, the United States recognized Kosovo when that breakaway region declared independence.

Each of these moves was seen as threatening to the Russians and served to push them in the opposite direction of American interests—in fact from mutual interests—on arms control, addressing the global threat from terrorism and the elimination of the threat of war in Europe. The Russians viewed the ABM abrogation and installation of the missile defense shield as hostile acts and as departures from the spirit of progress on mutual arms reductions and the control of nuclear weapons. Similarly, they viewed the expansion of NATO right up to the borders of Russia as a threat to at least tacit understandings reached at the time of the Two Plus Two agreement. The sense of outrage was so strong that Mikhail Gorbachev, uncharacteristically and bitterly objected to the American position as reneging on promises made at the time of German reunification.^[4] Finally, the recognition of Kosovo (yet to be emulated by most other countries) was seen as a slap in Russia's face, given its historic relationship with the Serbs, and to a general understanding reached at the time of the 1999 bombing campaign to which the Russians tacitly acquiesced.

At the time of the recognition of Kosovo, the Russians warned that they believed that there were analogous situations in the Caucasus (i.e. South Ossetia and Abkhazia) and intimated the right to similarly recognize those states should the situation arise. Although the Russians grossly overplayed their hand to their own detriment, when given the opportunity by Georgia, Russian actions last summer were not quite the black and white case of Russian aggression as presented in the recent American presidential campaign. The South Ossetians had declared independence from Georgia in 1991 and had Russian peace-keepers on the ground at the time of the military confrontation. The Russians viewed the Georgia incursion as having been encouraged by the United States and, to them, the provocative drive to bring Georgia into NATO. The Russians further complained that the United States' denunciation of Russian recognition of the independence of South Ossetia was a case of unfairly applying one set of rules to Kosovo and another to Georgia. (For the record, the majority of countries also have not recognized South Ossetian or Abkhazian independence).

Each of these actions has hurt the strategic interests of the United States. They are all examples of actions taken in one field that have hurt American interests in another. The point of the Cold War was not to replace one type of tension with another or to fuel another type of military competition with the Russians. The objective of a peaceful and stable Europe could certainly be achieved by some type of a neutral status of most of the former Warsaw Pact countries instead of expansion of NATO up to the border of Russia. Taking actions that the Russians view as both humiliating and threatening and then reneging on understandings reached in a period of mutual cooperation does not promote peace and stability. One also can question the logic of tying NATO treaty obligations to volatile and ethnically charged regions of the former Eastern bloc. Did any of the neocons ever read the history of the First World War? All of these actions must have certainly

dampened the Russian interest in further arms reductions (the START I treaty, which includes very important verification provisions, expires in 2009) and most certainly have undermined essential Russian cooperation in avoiding Iran from becoming a member of the nuclear club. Instead, we have a situation in which Russia and China are joined in the Shanghai Cooperative Organization (SCO) as somewhat of a counterbalance to NATO (Iran is trying to move from observer status to full member of SCO), and in which Russia has resumed strategic bomber flights and now intends to rebuild its blue water Navy. What has been accomplished by all of these actions except increased tensions, a nuclear Iran and the possibility of preemptive military action by Israel against Iran and the hell storm that would unleash?

The Three Es

A foreign policy should provide a coherent framework for the advancement of a nation's interests. A coherent foreign policy should make a country more stable and secure. Unfortunately, the policies of the Bush Administration did neither. In a strange reversal of the old Roman precept of divide and conquer, the Bush foreign policy has united adversaries and divided friends. The Bush foreign policy violated what could be called the three Es: example, economy of force and economy.

First, the foundation of American power in the world is the power of our example, of our moral leadership. That has obviously been weakened over the eight years that Bush was in office.

Second, the Administration violated the military doctrine of economy of force. The Bush national security policy has overextended and then strained the U.S. military. It has asserted American interests throughout the globe while failing to understand the national security interests of other countries in their own backyards. The Administration also failed to understand that our tremendous numerical strength in conventional and strategic warfare capabilities confers little in terms of power on the ground in volatile areas where conflict is carried out by insurgencies along age-old ethnic and tribal divisions. The Bush prescription seemed to jump too readily to military action before exhausting diplomacy. Even the hero of the final chapter of the Bush years, General David Petraeus, says "you have to talk to enemies" and used that as a bulwark of his counterinsurgency campaign [5].

Finally, there is the economy. It is the economy that drives innovation and enables funding for the various levers of national security projection. A healthy economy and economic freedom inspires much of the world. Unfortunately, the overextension of the United States in military action around the globe has cost the American taxpayer almost a trillion dollars in direct costs to date and possibly several fold that amount on the backs of taxpayers in future years. The use of those funds for that purpose rather than for education, science and technology, energy research, infrastructure and real homeland security has consequently made us weaker and more vulnerable in the years ahead as Dennis C. Blair, the new Director of National Intelligence confirmed in listing the collapse of the U.S. economy as the nation's leading national security threat.[6]

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3. See Note 2, *supra*.

4. Adrian Bloomfield and Mike Smith. "[Gorbachev: US Could Start a New Cold War](#)," *Telegraph*, May 6, 2008. Michael M. Boll, "[Superpower Diplomacy and German Unification: The Insider's Views](#)," *Parameters* (Winter 1996-97): 109-21.

5. General David Petraeus in a [speech at the Heritage Foundation](#), Washington, DC, October 8, 2008. "I do think you have to talk to enemies. I am not trying to get into domestic politics, but I mean what we did do in Iraq ultimately was to sit down with some of those that were shooting at us. What we tried to do was identify those who might be reconcilable."

6. Dennis C. Blair, Director of National Intelligence, [Annual Threat Assessment of the Intelligence Community for the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence](#), Washington, DC, February 12, 2009.